

# Chanukah—The Festival of Lights and Feast of Dedication

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ *Yeshua*:

The story of Chanukah takes place about two-hundred years before the birth of Christ during the time of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. A small group of Israelites led by a family of Aaronic priests called the Maccabees had risen against their Greek Syrian oppressors in what is called the Maccabean Revolt. The word “Maccabee” is an acronym for the verse in Exodus 15:11 “*Mi Komocha Baelim Hashem,*” meaning “Who is like You among the heavenly powers, O God.” It also represents the initial letters of the Maccabean leader’s name, Matisyahu Kohen Ben Yochanan, and, lastly, Maccabee is the Hebrew word for hammer—*Makav*.<sup>i</sup> K – I

This rebellion was not just a fight against a foreign occupying presence, but a spiritual battle against the Hellenization and assimilation of the Jewish people into Greek culture and idolatry. The sacrifice of pigs had desecrated the Temple, and the priests had become ritually impure by their exposure to men who had died in battle. Re-dedication of the Temple and sanctification of the priests (*Kohanim*) would require seven days according to the Mosaic Law, during which the menorah, the eternal lamp would need to burn continuously.

Upon recapturing the temple, the priests discovered there was only one crucible of pure olive oil, enough to burn for only one day. Nevertheless, they filled the menorah cups and lit the lamps with this small amount of oil they had found.

Miraculously, the oil in the cups of the menorah was enough to keep the menorah burning for eight days—enough time for the priests to purify themselves, after which they could prepare more oil to keep the eternal lamp burning beyond the eight days. For this reason, the Chanukah menorah has eight candles as opposed to the seven that were prescribed for the Temple.

The prophets and rabbis of the ancient judicial courts added seven additional commandments during the first millennium, after the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. Included is the festival of Chanukah and the commandment to kindle the Chanukah lights, as enacted on the first anniversary of the victory of the Maccabees over the Greek army in the year 139 B.C.<sup>ii</sup>

We know that the number seven in scripture is spiritually significant—“*And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God*” (*Revelation 4:5, NKJV*).<sup>iii</sup> Within our created world, the number

seven represents the fullness of time, for in seven days the heavens and the earth, and all their host were made. Seven is, therefore, the number that represents the completion of God's work in the creation. However, the number eight is also spiritually significant; even transcendent, and we will see why in a moment.

The rabbis of the Talmud have differing opinions about the precise nature of the miracle of Chanukah. Some say the oil was provided supernaturally, while others say the fire itself was supernatural. Unfortunately, God's commandment for the eternal flame required natural elements of olive oil and fire, so a miracle that substituted these natural elements for supernatural ones would violate God's Law. Therefore, these opinions are invalidated by scripture. The only acceptable answer is that the olive oil burned with a real flame, but at the same time, it did not burn. Like the burning bush witnessed by Moses; it was on fire but not consumed by the flames.

To understand this miracle, we turn to the narrative of the Talmud. It says: When they brought the Ark that Moses crafted into the Holy of Holies in the Temple of King Solomon, even though the total width of the Holy of Holies was only twenty cubits, nevertheless the Ark had ten cubits of space between it and the wall in every direction.<sup>iv</sup> "And it is written in the description of Solomon's Temple: 'And before the Sanctuary, which was twenty cubits in length, and twenty cubits in breadth' (I Kings 6:20). The place 'before the Sanctuary' is referring to the Holy of Holies. It was twenty by twenty cubits. If there were ten cubits of space on either side of the Ark, apparently the Ark itself occupied no space."<sup>v</sup>

How is this possible? How can something physically occupy space in our temporal realm, but at the same time not occupy it? This mystery suggests the underlying miracle. You see, a real flame burned with real olive oil for eight days, but at the same time, it didn't burn. In other words, it transcended our physical realm.

How does all this correlate in every way to Yeshua, the Messiah of Israel? Yeshua said, my kingdom is not of this world.<sup>vi</sup> He is the transcendent one born in the natural<sup>vii</sup>—the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end<sup>viii</sup> He is the one who is beyond time, even beyond our created world itself, and yet He walked in our shoes and suffered with us.<sup>ix</sup>

However, there is more. The spiritual and natural worlds oppose, even war against each other.<sup>x</sup> Why? The law of nature is about self-preservation of our flesh, but the law of the spirit gives us eternal life and has set us free from the law of sin and death.<sup>xi</sup> Yeshua is the ultimate fulfillment of this law, for *"the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many"* (Matthew 20:28).

The number eight points to a transcendent realm, that of another dimension—a spiritual world that exists within our physical realm, but at the same time does not appear to exist. Likewise, Yeshua is also beyond our temporal reality unless He opens our eyes to see the miracle. *"So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him"* (Luke 24:15-16).

The story of Chanukah is not part of the canonized Old Testament, and still, Rabbi Yeshua visited the Temple during the Feast of Dedication and revealed Himself as the Christ, the anointed one of Israel.<sup>xii</sup> Yeshua is the light of the world and the light of all men, so it was appropriate for Him to be revealed during Chanukah—the Festival of Lights.<sup>xiii</sup>

The Hebrew word Chanukah means *dedication* or *induction*, and can be traced to *chanukat hamizbeach*, “the dedication of the altar,” a term used in the inauguration of the Tabernacle of Moses.<sup>xiv</sup> After the Maccabees defeated the Greeks and drove them from Judea, and finding that much of the Temple, including the altar, had been defiled and used for idolatry, the Maccabees buried the defiled stones and built a new altar.<sup>xv</sup> Therefore, Chanukah, in part, celebrates the physical rededication of the Holy Temple and altar in Jerusalem.

The root of the word Chanukah is *chanu*, which means “they rested.” In the book of Daniel, we read, “*But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest (tanucha), and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days*” (Daniel 12:13). The Books of Daniel and Revelation directly correlate to each other, and Yeshua Himself quoted Daniel when asked by His disciples about the end-times (what is called eschatology).<sup>xvi</sup>

If we were to count the number of days from the beginning of what is called the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel (the beginning of the seven-year tribulation), we would find that the 335<sup>th</sup> day in the Hebrew calendar comes exactly 75-days after the Day of Atonement; falling precisely on the Feast of Dedication—Chanukah.<sup>xvii</sup> This alignment of time is not a coincidence, but rather a prophetic implication of the future Messianic promises for Israel. We can also conclude that this feast represents the beginning of the millennial kingdom, and for this reason, God commanded that the sons of the covenant (Jewish boys) are circumcised on the eighth day and not the seventh.<sup>xviii</sup>

We, who are in Christ, have become the temples of the living God—circumcised in the heart by the burning fire of the Holy Spirit. When Yeshua returns for us, it is written, “*the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord*” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Thus, as promised to Daniel, we also shall enter our eternal rest in Christ.

Our rabbinic sages proclaimed that the Chanukah menorah symbolizes an extension of the golden lampstand that stood in the Temple. For this reason, the Chanukah lights are considered holy. Unlike other vessels, the golden lampstand was not used in the formal priestly ceremonies. It was simply there to illuminate and to adorn the house of God, and to remind us that God is eternal and that He is the light of all men.

Our sages also proclaimed the blessings associated with lighting the Chanukah candles. They emphasized that the greater blessing was on the placement of the menorah in a window or door viewable to the public, to proclaim the miracle of God. Yeshua made a similar proclamation when He said to His disciples, “*You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light*

to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

Therefore, the story of Chanukah is a prophetic revelation of the return of Christ and the rebuilding and re-dedication of His earthly Temple in Jerusalem, but more significantly, the restoration and re-dedication of the Jewish people as God's bride. Israel is to become a kingdom of priests, as the Lord has promised, and the nations of the earth have been invited to share in this covenant relationship with Israel by joining her as "one new man" in Christ *Yeshua* and becoming "one people" of God. This group represents the great assembly (the *ecclesia*) of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.<sup>xix</sup> Together with Israel, we have been purified, made white and refined. May we enter His eternal rest, and may His eternal light burn forever in our hearts.

Amen!

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<sup>i</sup> Eisen, Yoseph. *The Events Before and After the Chanukah Miracle*. Chabad.org.

<sup>ii</sup> Posner, Yechezkel. *What Are the 7 Rabbinic Mitzvahs?* Chabad.org.

<sup>iii</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.

<sup>iv</sup> Talmud Tractate Bava Batra 99A.

<sup>v</sup> Megillah 10b:16-17.

<sup>vi</sup> John 18:36.

<sup>vii</sup> Isaiah 9:6, Luke 2:11, Romans 8:3.

<sup>viii</sup> Revelation 1:8.

<sup>ix</sup> Hebrews 2:18.

<sup>x</sup> Galatians 5:17.

<sup>xi</sup> Romans 8:2.

<sup>xii</sup> John 10:22-30.

<sup>xiii</sup> John 8:12.

<sup>xiv</sup> Numbers 7:84. Machzor Vitri, 239; Shiblei Haleket 174; see also Maharsha, Chidushei Agadot, Talmud, Shabbat 21a; and Igrot Kodesh, vol. 24, p. 267.

<sup>xv</sup> Shurpin, Yehuda. *What Does Chanukah Actually Mean?* Chabad.org.

<sup>xvi</sup> Matthew 24:15.

<sup>xvii</sup> Revelation 11:2-3, 12:6 & 13:5, Daniel 12:11-12.

<sup>xviii</sup> Leviticus 12:3.

<sup>xix</sup> Revelation 5:9.